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Letter dated 2 February 1999 from the Permanent Representatives of Austria and Indonesia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

We have the honour to transmit herewith the text of the report on the International Consultation on Research and Information Systems in Forestry,* which was an Austrian-Indonesian initiative in support of the programme of work of the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (see annex). These expert consultations were held at Gmunden, Austria, from 7 to 10 September 1998.

We would highly appreciate it if you would arrange for the present letter and the enclosed report to be circulated as an official document of the third session of the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests, to be held at Geneva from 3 to 14 May 1999.

(*Signed*) Ernst **Sucharipa**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations

(*Signed*) Makarim **Wibisono**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the United Nations

* The report is attached in the language of submission.

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Annex

International Consultation on Research and Information Systems in Forestry 7 – 10 September 1998, Gmunden, Austria

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. BACKGROUND FOR THE CONSULTATION:

At its final session, the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) recognized the need (1) *"to strengthen research, which was relevant to all the programme elements of its programme of work"*; (2) "*for a more comprehensive and focused approach, including support to regional research networks*"; and (3) for *"enhanced international efforts for more focused and effective funding and coordination of forest-related research and development*" (E/CN.17/1997/12). The Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF), established to continue the policy dialogue on forests, further elaborated on forest research issues.

Against this background the International Consultation on Research and Information Systems in Forestry (ICRIS) was organized as an inter-sessional activity in support of the IFF under the sponsorship of the Governments of Austria and Indonesia and in collaboration with CIFOR, FAO and IUFRO. The overall objective of ICRIS was to examine ways and means to implement research support and provide background information for international forestry initiatives. The Consultation addressed the critical theme of the interface between research and the user community, with particular reference to policy formulation. The recommendations for follow-up action from the Consultation are summarized below.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS (summarized from the full report):

Taking into account the deliberations and discussions during the Consultation and considering the importance of strengthening the scientific basis for the sustainable management of forests, the Consultation recommends that **the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests**:

(i) **REAFFIRMS** the value of building science capacity in all countries and URGES Governments to significantly increase national, regional and international efforts to strengthen forest research through (a) formulating relevant policies and strategies and (b) facilitating the development of appropriate institutions that will conduct, co-ordinate and lead research on priority areas relevant to sustainable management of forests with the active participation of all stakeholders including the poor and marginalized.

(ii) **CONSIDERS** the desirability of establishing a global forum or other appropriate body (for example a consultative body) to bring together policy-makers, funding agencies, forest research agencies, scientists and other stakeholders to provide guidance and direction to forest science initiatives and to strengthen policy-science linkages, particularly for intergovernmental forest policy initiatives such as IFF.

(iii) **ENDORSES AND PROMOTES** the development of a **Global Forest Information Service** to enhance access to all forest-related information, ensuring that it is accessible to all stakeholders including policy-makers, forest managers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community groups and the public at large.

(iv) **ENCOURAGES** governments to strengthen regional and global efforts focused on national research capacity building and strengthen research networks to "fast-track" capacity development as well as to provide windows of opportunities for inter-country/ inter-institutional collaboration in forest research.

(v) **INCLUDES** forest research as one of the elements of any future international arrangements or mechanisms - for example, a legally binding instrument – to recognize the importance of and to facilitate a continued knowledge generation through forest research to improve the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests and those who depend on them.

Report on the International Consultation on Research and Information Systems in Forestry 7 – 10 September 1998, Gmunden, Austria

"...there is no other basis for sound political decisions than the best available scientific evidence. This is especially true in the fields of resource management and environmental protection."

Gro Harlem Brundtland, Science 77:457 (1997)

1. BACKGROUND FOR THE CONSULTATION:

At its fourth and final session, the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) "requested the Centre for International Forestry Research, in collaboration with relevant organizations and in consultation with a group of internationally recognized experts, as well as in conjunction with national, regional, intergovernmental and non-governmental bodies, to develop as soon as possible mechanisms to:

(i) Guide the identification and definition as well as prioritization of global and eco-regional interdisciplinary research problems, taking into account national priorities and closely linked to practical and operational forest management issues;
(ii) Promote consortia or networks to lead and organize global forest research and ensure that results are made available to all users;
(iii) Build global capacity for forest research and develop new and innovative means for disseminating information and technologies;
(iv) Mobilize resources to accomplish the above objectives (E/CN.17/1997/12)."

The Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF), established to continue the policy dialogue on forests, further elaborated some of the issues relating to research support for forestry during its second session held during 24 August to 4 September, 1998 in Geneva. Among other issues, IFF2 drew specific attention to the following:

- the need for improved coordination that could be provided by networks for global forest-related research;
- assessment of existing research networks and their potential;
- the need for more institutionalized research on various aspects relating to all types of forests, including unique types of forests both in forested countries as well as in low forest cover countries;
- improved allocation of funds for priority research areas including support for research activities in developing countries; and
- adequate use of scientific and traditional knowledge to support sustainable management of forests.

IFF2 also stressed the need for targeted policy relevant research to support practitioners at the field level and requested the Secretariat to examine and provide proposals on institutions that could act as focal points for undertaking a systematic review of globally relevant ongoing research on forests and could guide a prioritization process to improve the information exchange between policy makers, forest practitioners and scientists.

Against this background the International Consultation on Research and Information Systems in Forestry (ICRIS) was organized as a government led initiative in support of the IFF under the sponsorship of the Governments of Austria and Indonesia and with the cooperation of the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the International Union of Forestry Research Organizations (IUFRO). The overall objective of ICRIS was to examine ways and means to implement research support and provide background information for international forestry initiatives. The Consultation addressed the critical theme of the interface between research and the user community, with particular reference to policy formulation and emerging issues worldwide.

The Consultation was attended by 80 participants. In addition to the presentation of a keynote paper on research contribution to policy formulation, theme papers on (a) research prioritization, (b) global and regional research networks, (c) research capacity building, (d) funding and (e) information technology were presented and discussed. The group discussions dealt with cross-cutting issues that are of direct relevance to the policy processes at the national and international levels, namely (i) increasing emphasis on environmental and biodiversity values of forests, (ii) diversification and involvement of stakeholders, (iii) role of transnational and private investment in forest research, (iv) development in the frontier areas of science and (v) meeting the technology needs of the poor and marginalized people. Important conclusions emerging from the Consultation and the recommendations for follow-up action are summarized below.

2. CONCLUSIONS:

New challenges are confronting the managers of the world's forests, with stakeholders demanding a broader range of goods and services as well as a voice in setting priorities on the use of forests. Management is becoming more sophisticated and adaptive, seeking to achieve balance among multiple products and services. Good science has a vital role in generating new information that can provide input to the international dialogue on forests through the provision of synthesis of existing information and knowledge; the generation of new policy-relevant information in identified priority areas; and the input of expert technical advice as requested by IFF and other international bodies. The Consultation discussed the keynote paper and theme papers in the context of the emerging issues. The conclusions, general and theme-specific, are indicated below:

2.1. General Conclusions:

- Meeting the diverse needs of the large number of forestry stakeholders and in particular enhancing the role of forests in poverty alleviation, and protecting and enhancing the biodiversity and other environmental values of forests require substantial efforts to strengthen the knowledge generation process at all levels. The science inputs for forest policy processes can help effectively and primarily address these issues.

- Policies and actions covering the global, regional and national levels, aimed at strengthening sustainable management of forests, require a more integrated and holistic knowledge base than is currently available. Balanced research programmes can help protect the interests of all including those without an effective lobbying voice, i.e. the poor.

- Global and regional problems, such as deforestation, declining environmental quality and reduction in biodiversity require local solutions based on integrated approaches that take full advantage of local/indigenous knowledge strengthened through application of developments in frontier areas of science.

- Many investments in research yield high rates of return in the long term and can have significant multiplier effects. Furthermore, many forestry programmes and projects without research components have failed to produce the desired results because of inadequate understanding of the underlying scientific principles.

2.2. Linkage Between Research and Policy Formulation:

Relevant and credible information about complex systems is increasingly essential to forest policy decisions and such information covering both natural and human sciences, is an essential ingredient in policy deliberations in a world where forest management is the focus of intense national and international debate. This is especially relevant in a world where an increasing dialogue exists over forest policies between civil society, governments and international organizations. The provision of unbiased and objective information to all stakeholders is an important step in the empowerment process. As a result, the Consultation noted that:

- Research is critical in unraveling the complex interrelations between natural and social systems and thus in contributing to knowledge-based policies and actions at national, regional and global levels.

- The institutional arrangements and strategies for conducting forest research and achieving policy and practice innovations are changing rapidly, accelerated through the developments in information and communication technologies.

- Successful research and development, based on systematic interaction between users of research results and researchers delivers effective solutions, which are more closely fitted to user needs.

- Institutional changes to facilitate successful research and development have been rather slow and inadequate to meet the emerging challenges facing sustainable forest management.

2.3. Research Prioritization:

The Consultation considered different mechanisms for research prioritization and noted that:

- With a few notable exceptions (i.e. CIFOR, European Forestry Institute (EFI)), there is a lack of engagement between those who use information at a global scale and the producers of research information at the national level which results in a system where information is often fragmented and .not readily integrated.

- Priority-setting mechanisms at the regional and national levels are often weak or nonexistent. And even where they exist, priority-setting mechanisms are often controlled by those with little or no knowledge of forest-related sciences and policy relevance.

- As a consequence research has not been able to effectively respond to the demands from all the diverse stakeholders and has been unable to incorporate the concerns of the poor and marginalized people and research agendas have been primarily supply driven.

2.4. Global and Regional Research Networks:

Global and regional research networks offer immense potential for dealing with common ecoregional problems and to "fast track" research capacity building in countries where such capacity is inadequate. In particular, such networks and consortia help to develop critical mass of, and attractive research careers for, researchers in areas where research capacity is inadequate. The Consultation noted that:

- Networking is an important option for many countries and institutions to overcome resource constraints and to enable the transfer and adaptation of technology found appropriate elsewhere.

- Networking becomes meaningful and effective only if it can "add value" to individual efforts or promote synergistic effects among network participants. However, the potential of networks to help build research capacity, especially in developing countries has been largely unrealized mainly due to lack of a well-defined strategy that takes into account the costs and benefits of networking. For nearly all forest research networks, information exchange continues to be the main activity.

- Most networking is among researchers with the same disciplinary backgrounds and narrow specialization, whereas problem-solving research requires involvement of

stakeholders and researchers with diverse backgrounds in collaborative research networks.

2.5. Capacity Building for Forest Research:

The Consultation reviewed the ongoing efforts at research capacity building and the issues relating to research capacity enhancement focusing particularly on the needs of developing countries and poor and marginalized peoples and noted the following:

- Enhancing efforts in forest research capacity building are fundamental for achieving sustainable development and conservation of forests. Capacity building is needed to assist in the transfer of results and technologies to enhance the use of available knowledge, to improve networking and to facilitate science-based decision making at all levels. Capacity building is especially important in developing individual researchers to encourage worthwhile careers in science.

- Research and technology development capacities of most developing countries are highly underdeveloped and they are unable to participate in the process of knowledge generation as equal partners. The gap between the developed and developing countries with regard to science and technology is widening, accentuating the existing disparities.

- More than the narrow technical aspects of research, it is important to consider the policy context and institutional changes as well as how research organizations can address these emerging issues and adapt themselves to the ever-changing conditions.

- In general most capacity building support provided by official development assistance is project oriented, short term and input-focused, whereas meaningful capacity enhancement requires more consistent, flexible and output oriented long term support.

- Capacity development when dealing with holistic global problems is not a problem confined to developing countries but is equally relevant to all countries.

2.6. Changing Patterns of Research Funding:

The Consultation dealt with various issues relating to mobilization of funds for forest research and examined ways and means for making forest research more client-oriented and responsive to "market signals". It was noted that a fundable research programme must respond to the policy agenda and that it is necessary to replace the supply driven research by genuine demand driven efforts. The Consultation noted that:

- Funding for forest research at the international and national levels remains far from adequate. While there is growing investment by the private sector in research that leads to increased revenue generation, there is an urgent need for enhanced investment to facilitate knowledge generation and also to meet the technology needs of the poor and marginalized people, small farmers and such other groups who are unable to pay for innovation.

- Low levels of funding are partly due to the failure of research institutions and scientists to demonstrate to stakeholders the benefits from research. Much of the research is still not driven by the needs of the intended users and beneficiaries.

- Greater resources are needed not for pursuing more-of-the-same research, but for change towards new agendas and alliances and resource allocation has to be based on ex-ante impact assessment of research.

- Sources of funding for conservation and development of forests have diversified. The public sector plays a diminishing role, while the roles of the private and non-governmental sectors are growing rapidly. These changes have yet to be reflected in private sector forest research investments.

2.7. Better Access to Information on Forests:

Based on the paper presented by the IUFRO acting Task Force on information detailing the establishment of a Global Forest Information Service (GFIS), the Consultation examined issues associated with access to information by different users, in particular those who are not linked to global information systems, stakeholder involvement in developing data bases, political and legal aspects including intellectual property rights, and mechanisms for standardization and quality control. In particular the Consultation:

- Emphasized the urgent need to improve access to information at all levels and coordinate the information flow by strengthening the linkage between information providers and information users. Particular efforts should be made to ensure that disparities in access to information are not accentuated, undermining the opportunities for effective participation of developing country scientists in knowledge generation and exchange;

- Endorsed the proposal to develop a Global Forest Information System as a meta database ensuring that political and legal issues are taken into account and efforts

are made to ensure quality control through appropriate mechanisms. In this context, the consultation took note of the recommendation of IFF2 concerning the need for co-operation leading towards a comprehensive directory of forest-related international and regional organizations and instruments engaged in forest-related international activities (IFF2 Programme element II.e, Item 12c);

- Stressed the need to improve access to information to all stakeholders, in particular to the poor and marginalized people, to enable their effective participation in forest resource management;

- Recognised that forest research capacity is unevenly distributed between and within countries and that major gains could be achieved by improved information exchange at national, regional and global levels. Particular effort should be made to ensure that the information is presented in forms that are appropriate to the users – policy makers, professionals and the public.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS:

Taking into account the deliberations and discussions during the Consultation and considering the importance of strengthening the scientific basis for the sustainable management of forests, the Consultation recommends that **the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests**:

(i) **REAFFIRMS** the value of building science capacity in all countries and **URGES** Governments to significantly increase national, regional and international efforts to strengthen forest research through (a) formulating relevant policies and strategies and (b) facilitating the development of appropriate institutions that will conduct, co-ordinate and lead research on priority areas relevant to sustainable management of forests with the active participation of all stakeholders including the poor and marginalized. Special attention should be given to encouraging cross-sectoral co-operation as well as promoting the dialogue between the users and beneficiaries of scientific activities and the research community.

(ii) **CONSIDERS** the desirability of establishing a global forum or other appropriate body (for example a consultative body) to bring together policy-makers, funding agencies, forest research agencies, scientists and other stakeholders to provide guidance and direction to forest science initiatives and to strengthen policy-science linkages, particularly in the context of intergovernmental forest policy initiatives like IFF. The possible functions of such a body might include:

- identifying possible science elements in international instruments on forests;
- synthesizing currently available knowledge to strengthen policy decisions;
- encouraging and supporting the development of research capacity development at the national, regional and global levels, in accordance with the relevant policies (national, regional or global) relating to forest and allied sectors;

- strengthening linkage with other allied international bodies (e.g.: SBSTTA of the CBD, IPCC of UNEP, SBSTA of the FCCC[1]) to avoid duplication of efforts and to strengthen the synergy of global efforts; and
- mobilizing and channeling resources to strengthen research at all levels and in particular to address critical policy issues.

(iii) **ENDORSES AND PROMOTES** the development of a **Global Forest Information Service** to enhance access to all forest-related information, ensuring that it is accessible to all stakeholders including policy-makers, forest managers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community groups and the public at large.

(iv) **ENCOURAGES** the governments to strengthen regional and global efforts focused on national research capacity building and strengthen research networks to "fast-track" capacity development as well as to provide windows of opportunities for inter-country/ inter-institutional collaboration in forest research.

(v) **INCLUDES** forest research as one of the elements of any future international arrangements or mechanisms - for example, a legally binding instrument – to recognize the importance of and to facilitate a continued knowledge generation through forest research to improve the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests and those who depend on them.

4. EXPECTED OUTPUTS:

Implementation of the above recommendations is expected to contribute to the following outputs that are critical to the sustainable management of forests in all countries:

- **Improved linkage between forest science, forest policy processes, and decision-making** at the national and international levels;

- **Enhanced participation of all countries in the generation of knowledge** relevant to current and emerging societal needs and in particular to meet the needs of the poor and marginalised people;

- **Improved and transparent access to information** relating to forests and forestry to all stakeholders with particular attention being given to reduce disparities arising from the uneven spread of technologies.

[1] Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) of the Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC).

5. FOLLOW-UP:

The cadre of international forest scientists commit themselves to implementing as many of these recommendations as they can within the constraints of existing resources and through their own voluntary organizations. To this end, IUFRO agrees to:

- **Establish** Task Forces on the **Forest Science-Policy Interface** and on the **Global Forest Information Service** (GFIS) with representation from a range of research organizations, countries as well as stakeholders, including NGOs involved in relevant research activities;

- **Strengthen** the ongoing efforts of existing task forces[2] to enhance science inputs to the policy dialogue;

- **Organize** satellite meetings in collaboration with CIFOR, EFI, FAO and other interested organizations during the third and fourth sessions of the IFF as an ICRIS follow-up activity in support of the IFF dialogue.

- **Undertake** a synthesis of the state of the-art in forest related sciences by encouraging all IUFRO research groups and working parties to develop "State-of-the-Art Reports" for discussion during its World Congress 2000 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

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[2] Existing IUFRO Task Forces are Environmental Change, Forests in Sustainable Mountain Development, Internet Resources, Management and Conservation of Forest Gene Resources, Sustainable Forest Management, and Water and Forests.